

Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) for Elgin (Lacy Drive) Tower Telecommunication Facility

Introduction

Bastrop County proposes to acquire and install a new 800 megahertz (MHz) radio trunking system. The new system will consist of three telecommunication radio towers in Bastrop County, Texas. The Draft Elgin (Lacey Drive) Tower Telecommunication Facility Environmental Assessment (EA) provides an analysis of potential environmental impacts associated with the use of grant funds issued by the Public Safety Interoperable Communications (PSIC) Grant Program, administered by the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) of the U.S. Department of Commerce. This Draft EA covers the proposed Elgin (Lacy Drive) tower site, one of the three towers in the new proposed 800 MHz radio trunking system. The other two telecommunication sites will utilize existing towers and are not part of this EA. Bastrop County is located in the central part of the State of Texas within the Austin-Round Rock metropolitan area.

Scope of the Environmental Assessment (EA)

The proposed Elgin (Lacey Drive) tower project will apply funds issued by the PSIC Grant Program. The PSIC Grant Program was developed to assist State, local, tribal, and nongovernmental agencies in developing interoperable communications as they leverage the newly available spectrum in the 700 megahertz (MHz) band. As a condition of the PSIC Grant Program, grantees must comply with all relevant Federal legislation, including the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) of 1969.

The NTIA has specified that PSIC funds must be used for projects that would improve communications in areas at high risk for natural disasters, in urban and metropolitan areas at high risk for terrorism threats, and should include pre-positioning or securing of interoperable communications for immediate deployment during emergencies or major disasters. Investments receiving PSIC funds can range from installation of new large-scale infrastructure (i.e., towers) to the acquisition of mobile and portable radios. Under the categories outlined in the PSIC Grant Program's Programmatic EA and FONSI (April 2009), the proposed Elgin (Lacy Drive) tower project is classified as a transmission and receiving site.

The proposed Elgin (Lacey Drive) tower project will allow for the following:

- Increased coverage area for emergency responders connected through the system
- Updated equipment to new frequencies to improve and expand voice and data coverage
- Facilitate reliable interoperable communications among first responder organizations
- Enhanced security and facility control

This Draft EA examines the proposed action to develop a new telecommunications facility in Bastrop County, Texas. The proposed Elgin (Lacey Drive) tower project would include the construction of a 450-foot self-support telecommunications tower (no guy wires) within a 100-foot by 100-foot fenced compound with associated equipment. The total ground-disturbance area is less than 0.25 acres. The proposed site will be located on city owned property adjacent to a City of Elgin water tank. Existing utilities for electrical power will be slightly extended to allow for easier access. An existing gravel access road will be used for construction and operational maintenance site access. The Draft EA analyses existing conditions and environmental consequences of the Proposed Action for 11 resource areas (noise, air quality, geology and soils, water resources, biological resources, historic and cultural, land use, aesthetic and visual, infrastructure, socioeconomic resources, and human health and safety).

Alternatives Considered

Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative). Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative) would implement the Elgin (Lacey Drive) Tower Telecommunication Facility in its entirety, consisting of a 450-foot self-support tower (no guy wires) within a 100-foot by 100-foot chain-linked fenced compound, a 12-foot by 16-foot equipment shelter, a stand alone emergency generator, associated liquefied propane tank, control utility board, and associated telecommunications equipment. The proposed Elgin (Lacey Drive) tower project will facilitate enhanced security and facility control, reliable interoperable communications, and significant increased coverage area for emergency responders. The site topography provides natural height resulting in enhanced coverage with the proposed 450-foot tower. The facility will be constructed in a manner to allow for future expansion needs, to reduce any retrofitting that would be required otherwise as the site provides additional area for expansion.

No Action Alternative. Under the No Action Alternative, current radio system coverage requirements would not be met causing serious limitations on emergency response, funding for interoperable communications and information systems infrastructure would not be released, and infrastructure would neither be developed nor enhanced. Ongoing maintenance activities would continue using the current funding sources; however, no new activities would be funded using PSIC grant funds. The Proposed Action would not move forward with PSIC funds or any alternate funding sources. The No Action Alternative served as the baseline for assessing the impacts of the alternatives in the Draft EA.

Recommended Alternative

Alternative 1 (Preferred Alternative) is recommended for implementation and best meets the purpose and the need of Bastrop County to acquire and install a new 800 megahertz radio trunking system at the Elgin (Lacey Drive) site. The Preferred Alternative would facilitate greater security and facility control, reliable interoperable communications, and significant increased coverage area for emergency responders. The No Action Alternative would not address the need for Bastrop County.

Consultations

Coordination on fish and wildlife issues to meet the Section 7 requirements of the Endangered Species Act (ESA) was accomplished through a preliminary review of protected species from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) Division of Endangered Species Web site to identify listed and proposed threatened and endangered species, as well as critical habitats that may be located on or near the proposed Elgin (Lacey Drive) tower site. Based on a review of the USFWS Web site, the Houston Toad (*Bufo houstonensis*), Whooping Crane (*Grus Americana*), Bald Eagle (*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*), and Navasota ladies' tresses (*Spiranthes parksii*) were identified. Habitats for these species were compared to the habitat present at the proposed Elgin (Lacey Drive) tower site; none of the habitats were identified having a potential to be found on the proposed site. USFWS concurred with the conclusions of the Draft EA that the Proposed Action may affect but is not likely to adversely affect biological resources.

Coordination on historic and cultural resources issues was accomplished through an informal consultation with the Texas State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO) to determine whether the construction of the proposed Elgin (Lacey Drive) tower site and installation of associated antennae, microwave links, and infrastructure may generate any short- or long-term indirect impacts to historic and cultural resources and may be located within the viewshed of any historic and cultural resources. The construction of the proposed Elgin (Lacey Drive) tower site may indirectly impact the viewshed of architectural resources in the area if it is not aesthetically compatible with the character of the historic surroundings. A desktop assessment was conducted to determine if any historic and cultural resources were listed in the area of potential effect (APE). A public notice was issued related to impacts to historic and cultural resources in the legal notices section of the *Elgin Courier* on April 6, 2009. No public or agency comments were

received. In addition, the Texas SHPO concurred with the Draft EA that the Proposed Action would be expected to have no significant impact and the Proposed Action will not affected historic properties and the project may proceed.

Findings and Conclusions

The proposed Elgin (Lacey Drive) tower project is not likely to result in any environmental impacts and does not involve any unusual risks or impacts to sensitive areas. The Proposed Action will require construction of a new transmitting and receiving 450-foot self-support telecommunications tower having no guy wires and with ground disturbance activities (totaling 0.22 acres). In accordance with 47 Code of Federal Regulations (CFR) Section 1.1307 (a) (1) through (8), an evaluation was made to determine whether any of the listed Federal Communications Commission (FCC) special interest items would be significantly affected if a tower structure and/or antenna and associated equipment control cabinets were constructed at the proposed site location. No FCC special interest items were identified.

NTIA Review

NTIA determined that the July 2009 Elgin (Lacey Drive) Tower Telecommunication Facility Draft EA adequately assessed the potential individual and cumulative environmental impacts of the proposed telecommunication facility development including a 450-foot self-support telecommunications tower, and that the scope, alternatives considered, and content of the EA are adequate.

This Finding of No Significant Impact (FONSI) is based on the attached Draft EA which has been independently evaluated by the NTIA and determined to adequately and accurately discuss the environmental issues and impacts of the proposed project and provides sufficient evidence and analysis for determining that an environmental impact statement is not required.

Based on the best available information and NTIA's independent review, NTIA has decided to adopt the July 2009 Elgin (Lacey Drive) Tower Telecommunication Facility Draft EA. The Draft EA is available for public review at <http://www.ntia.doc.gov/psic/>. This FONSI has therefore been prepared and is being submitted to document environmental review and evaluation in compliance with the NEPA of 1969. The decision documents for the environmental review of the Proposed Action are attached.

I have considered the information contained in the Draft EA, which is the basis for this FONSI. Based on the information in the Draft EA and this FONSI document, I agree that the Proposed Action as described above, and in the Draft EA, will have no significant impact on the environment.

8/13/09
Date

Laura M. Pettus
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Department of Commerce
National Telecommunications and Information Administration

RPM
Responsible Program Manager

ADOPTION OF EXISTING ENVIRONMENTAL DOCUMENT

Description of proposal: Elgin (Lacey Drive) Tower Telecommunication Facility

Proponent: Texas SAA / Bastrop County

Location of current proposal: Elgin, Bastrop County, Texas

Title of document being adopted: Elgin (Lacey Drive) Tower Telecommunication Facility

Agency that prepared document being adopted: Bastrop County

Date adopted document was prepared: July 8, 2009

Description of document (or portion) being adopted: The Elgin (Lacey Drive) Tower Telecommunication Facility Draft EA provides an analysis of the proposed action to construct a new transmission and receiving site in Bastrop County. The proposed Elgin (Lacey Drive) tower site would consist of a 450-foot self-support tower (no guy wires) within a 100-foot by 100-foot chain-linked fenced compound facility, a 12-foot by 16-foot equipment shelter, stand alone emergency generator, associated liquefied propane tank, control utility board, and associated telecommunications equipment. The tower and site construction and equipment acquisition/installation for this proposed action does not have any significant environmental impacts or extraordinary circumstances.

The document is available to be read at: <http://www.ntia.doc.gov/psic>

The Department of Commerce has identified and adopted this document as being appropriate for NTIA's purposes after independent review. The document meets its environmental review needs for approval under the PSIC Grant Program and will accompany the proposal to the decision maker.

Name of agency adopting the document: National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA)

Contact person if other than responsible official: N/A

Responsible Official: Laura M. Pettus

Position/Title: Responsible Program Manager

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DATE OF ISSUE: August 13, 2009

SIGNATURE:

Signed:



Date:

